

## Meeting the Challenge

Johnnie Butler left this week....

Johnnie drove the car Alan and Kathy Simis left...

My car is in the shop for maintenance so I drive the beast...

I drive my daughter to school mornings

Some times we sing or listen to music

Sometimes we sit quietly and play hand games

Sometimes we just talk

The other morning she said "I hate ingles... English..."

Or math or whatever

But I clued in on the word 'hate'

And I talked about how we aren't people who hate

Of course I had to ignore a few things that I had been hating recently

For sake of defining a principle

Then I received a word:

We shouldn't say we hate things

What we should say is that we are challenged by the things we find difficult"

...and that we have to remember that we are people who rise to challenges

and overcome them...I then define 'challenge' for her...

Now we get about 4 more minutes for conversation...

We pass the sweeping man

The bad curve/intersection ...which I hate...I mean

Her lack of response either means that she is processing this information or have moved on to something else...not sure...

We get to the light sometimes challenging  
Then the last stretch to the parking lot  
Books, tarea, two kisses  
And I watch her walk away

So I go back to the car and I think about this word that I've been  
given  
'Challenge'

Hold that thought while I digress...

Friday as we (beasted) our way towards school she mentioned a  
classmate who had taken something from another kid. That they  
had actually stolen it...and that stealing was bad...and that she  
took something once and mommy had made her give it back. I  
remembered her taking a fastener once...  
And then she asked me..."Daddy did you ever steal anything when  
you were little?"  
I answered... yes. Tell me the story about it she said...  
"I don't really want to talk about it right now" I answered.

I've known for a long time that I would not want to conceal the  
truth of my life from my children or my wife or my friends.

So I can look forward with some dread to questions about  
substance abuse and sex.

Many of us live in fear that revealing our past **may** make us un-  
loveable

I come to know in my severely limited wisdom that hiding who  
you were or are  
in fact makes a person un-loveable since you have to know  
someone to love them as opposed to loving an illusion of them.

So...since she asked...about me stealing I will need to answer her question.

...and eventually the others issues as well whether she asks or not.

...because to be fully known precedes being fully loved

Amazing that you really don't ever get away with anything...not if you want to be loved...really loved

Because Love is of God and Lies are of Satan and the two substances do not mix.

They can not occupy the same space at the same time.

God who knows us fully and loves us cannot love un-repentant sin in our lives

Nor can we offer Him a love

Jesus wants to close the gaps between Our Father and Us

And wants us through His power to help close the gaps between us

The enemy...our enemy...Satan wants to maintain and widen the gaps he created through his trickery between us and the Father and each other

Satan wants me to sin...and you to sin...he says...do it ...you know you want to do it...you may not get another chance...everybody else does it...you deserve it...and then he says "cover it up" ...lie if you need to... just be careful and don't get caught...no one will be the wiser...you will be fine

What he doesn't directly say is:

Satans Recipe

Don't trust God...He won't provide for you

Just walk farther and faster until you can hear Him anymore

Deny what you think you hear as His voice

Wrap your life up in lies so that no one, not even you, can see the real you

Show them what they want to see and let them love that person not the un-loveable inner self we have created together  
...It will only seem good enough  
Repeat until dead  
I'll come for you later

He doesn't tell you about the cracks that become gaps that become canyons between us and the God and people that want to love us and be loved by us that we push away.

He tells us "you can make it on our own".

But alas I digress...as promised.

Back in my car I thought about this idea of word substitution  
Hate for challenge...I liked what it did

Hate was an emotion it was static and wanted to be just what it was  
Hate was a word that expressed defeat  
Hate wanted the thing hated to change...to become some other thing  
Hate put my will at the center of the interaction or rather inaction

This beautiful word challenge  
Is so important that the enemy has turned it into a joke...  
Short people are vertically challenged  
I have been said to be etiquette challenged  
He's hygienically challenged

In the interest of political correctness we overuse the word and deflate its potency

But this word 'challenge'

Says there is something at stake here  
You are being called out  
And you wouldn't be called if you weren't worthy  
It says that there is something to be overcome  
And that we just might be overcomers  
It says that change is inevitable here  
It will change or we will change but change will occur  
It says that we are a part of a process not a victim of circumstance  
It says that stand not alone at the center but as a part of a greater whole  
It is a paradigm buster and an attitude adjuster

It has the power to transform 'nothin's any good' to 'It's all good'

But we were never meant to meet challenges alone  
That's why God gave us churches, communities, neighbors,  
families, His Son, His Holy Spirit, Himself

### Romans 8 (The Message)

**1** With the arrival of Jesus, the Messiah, that fateful dilemma is resolved. Those who enter into Christ's being-here-for-us no longer have to live under a continuous, low-lying black cloud. **2** A new power is in operation. The Spirit of life in Christ, like a strong wind, has magnificently cleared the air, freeing you from a fated lifetime of brutal tyranny at the hands of sin and death. **3** God went for the jugular when he sent his own Son. He didn't deal with the problem as something remote and unimportant. In his Son, Jesus, he personally took on the human condition, entered the disordered mess of struggling humanity in order to set it right once and for all. The law code, weakened as it always was by fractured human nature, could never have done that. **4** And now what the law code asked for but we couldn't deliver is accomplished as we, instead of redoubling our own efforts, simply embrace what the Spirit is doing in us. **5** Those who think they can do it on their own end up obsessed with measuring their own moral muscle but never get

around to exercising it in real life. Those who trust God's action in them find that God's Spirit is in them - living and breathing God! **6** Obsession with self in these matters is a dead end; attention to God leads us out into the open, into a spacious, free life. **7** Focusing on the self is the opposite of focusing on God. Anyone completely absorbed in self ignores God, ends up thinking more about self than God. That person ignores who God is and what he is doing. **8** And God isn't pleased at being ignored. **9** But if God himself has taken up residence in your life, you can hardly be thinking more of yourself than of him. Anyone, of course, who has not welcomed this invisible but clearly present God, the Spirit of Christ, won't know what we're talking about. **10** But for you who welcome him, in whom he dwells - even though you still experience all the limitations of sin - you yourself experience life on God's terms. **11** It stands to reason, doesn't it, that if the alive-and-present God who raised Jesus from the dead moves into your life, he'll do the same thing in you that he did in Jesus, bringing you alive to himself? When God lives and breathes in you (and he does, as surely as he did in Jesus), you are delivered from that dead life. With his Spirit living in you, your body will be as alive as Christ's! **12** So don't you see that we don't owe this old do-it-yourself life one red cent. **13** There's nothing in it for us, nothing at all. The best thing to do is give it a decent burial and get on with your new life. **14** God's Spirit beckons. There are things to do and places to go! **15** This resurrection life you received from God is not a timid, grave-tending life. It's adventurously expectant, greeting God with a childlike "What's next, Papa?" **16** God's Spirit touches our spirits and confirms who we really are. We know who he is, and we know who we are: Father and children. **17** And we know we are going to get what's coming to us - an unbelievable inheritance! We go through exactly what Christ goes through. If we go through the hard times with him, then we're certainly going to go through the good times with him! **18** That's why I don't think there's any comparison between the present hard times and the coming good times. **19** The created world itself can hardly wait for what's

coming next. **20** Everything in creation is being more or less held back. God reins it in **21** until both creation and all the creatures are ready and can be released at the same moment into the glorious times ahead. Meanwhile, the joyful anticipation deepens. **22** All around us we observe a pregnant creation. The difficult times of pain throughout the world are simply birth pangs. But it's not only around us; it's within us. The Spirit of God is arousing us within. We're also feeling the birth pangs. **23** These sterile and barren bodies of ours are yearning for full deliverance. **24** That is why waiting does not diminish us, any more than waiting diminishes a pregnant mother. We are enlarged in the waiting. We, of course, don't see what is enlarging us. **25** But the longer we wait, the larger we become, and the more joyful our expectancy. **26** Meanwhile, the moment we get tired in the waiting, God's Spirit is right alongside helping us along. If we don't know how or what to pray, it doesn't matter. He does our praying in and for us, making prayer out of our wordless sighs, our aching groans. **27** He knows us far better than we know ourselves, knows our pregnant condition, and keeps us present before God. **28** That's why we can be so sure that every detail in our lives of love for God is worked into something good. **29** God knew what he was doing from the very beginning. He decided from the outset to shape the lives of those who love him along the same lines as the life of his Son. The Son stands first in the line of humanity he restored. We see the original and intended shape of our lives there in him. **30** After God made that decision of what his children should be like, he followed it up by calling people by name. After he called them by name, he set them on a solid basis with himself. And then, after getting them established, he stayed with them to the end, gloriously completing what he had begun. **31** So, what do you think? With God on our side like this, how can we lose? **32** If God didn't hesitate to put everything on the line for us, embracing our condition and exposing himself to the worst by sending his own Son, is there anything else he wouldn't gladly and freely do for us? **33** And who would dare tangle with God by messing with one of God's chosen?

**34** Who would dare even to point a finger? The One who died for us - who was raised to life for us! - is in the presence of God at this very moment sticking up for us. **35** Do you think anyone is going to be able to drive a wedge between us and Christ's love for us? There is no way! Not trouble, not hard times, not hatred, not hunger, not homelessness, not bullying threats, not backstabbing, not even the worst sins listed in Scripture: **36** They kill us in cold blood because they hate you. We're sitting ducks; they pick us off one by one. **37** None of this fazes us because Jesus loves us. **38** I'm absolutely convinced that nothing - nothing living or dead, angelic or demonic, today or tomorrow, **39** high or low, thinkable or unthinkable - absolutely nothing can get between us and God's love because of the way that Jesus our Master has embraced us.

So, I actually have something good to tell my children about my past:

First that it is the past  
...but that God was and is dealing with all of it...all of it...every  
God forgiven bit of it  
...sealing the cracks...standing the gaps...moving mountains to fill  
the canyons that divide us and weaving the ties that bind us  
together.

Everything God has given us... taken from us ...offered us...  
denied us... hidden from us,...revealed to us, ...or promised us  
...has been for the sake of our growing in Him  
Meeting challenges day by day shoulder to shoulder in complete  
and true love...knowing and fully known... loving and fully  
loved...amen.